

Short Story of the Day.

THE SPELLING SCHOOL

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When the school board of district No. 5, which included the hamlet of Bebee's Corners, announced that they had engaged a schoolma'am for the winter term instead of a schoolmaster, there was much wondering among the farm-houses as to how she would manage things. For three successive winters the schoolmaster had been thrashed by a gang of bad boys, led by hulking Joe Whitman, and folks predicted that the new teacher would be picked up, carried out and dropped into a snowdrift the first day.

Seth Thomas, a young farmer, drove over to the railroad station to meet Miss Baker when her school was ready to open, and his surprise was reflected on all sides. She was a slip of a girl, less than 20 years old and shy, and this was her first school. She had taken it because her mother was an invalid and her father had failed in business, but that came out afterward. That a good-looking, refined young woman like Miss Baker should take a country school at \$25 a month instead of getting married was a mystery no one could solve.

Seth Thomas was 23 years old, and he also was shy. During the three-mile drive the pair did not exchange a hundred words. Seth was awed and scared by the girl's good looks, and she was frightened at coming among strangers. She was driven to the Carsons' where she was to board, and she saw no more

of Seth for a fortnight. Her only remembrance of him was that he had a plain, good-natured face and a pleasant voice.

During this 'fortnight Bob Graham walked home with her from school on several occasions, Jim Taylor made two calls at the Carsons'. Tom Lane drove her to school one stormy morning, and Charley Saunders, acknowledged the most stylish young farmer for five miles around, escorted her to evening church services and home again. Her school had started off bravely, and she had no idea that it was all owing to the bashful Seth. He had been afraid to call on her, but he wasn't afraid to meet Joe Whitman and his crowd the day before school opened and to say to them:

"Look here, now. You boys have got to behave yourselves this winter. If you give that little schoolma'am one bit of trouble, I'll thrash every one of you till you can't crawl home!"

There was a difference of opinion until Seth had picked each up separately, shaken most of the devilry out of him and then driven him head first into a snowdrift. That settled the question of mutiny. Later on, when he had worked up the courage to call on the new teacher, she was lying down with a headache and asked to be excused. Two weeks later, when he called again, she happened to be out. Seth did not try again. He got the idea that she didn't care to see him, and, though willing to acknowledge to himself that he was homely, angular and awkward, it hurt him that she should think so. She must think so, of course, as she was always "at home" to other young men, and they lost no opportunity of boasting of how flatteringly they were received.

Six weeks after school opened Seth was driving past the schoolhouse one

day when the sounds of a disturbance reached his ears. Joe Whitman had forgotten his shaking up and decided to break loose. That meant carrying Miss Baker outdoors and ducking her in a snowdrift, but there was a loose wheel in the programme. He had just started for the door with her in his arms when Seth Thomas walked in. Presto, it was Joe who found the snowdrift!

The schoolma'am would have taken Seth by the hand and thanked him, but when he had concluded the performance he drove away without a look toward the schoolhouse. Then the girl's intuition told her that the awkward Seth was an admirer who felt himself snubbed, and for the next four weeks she hoped he might call on her or that they might meet elsewhere and have an explanation. He avoided her, however, though, if he had but known it, she gave more thought to him than to all the others.

There was always a midwinter spelling school at the Corners. Teachers and pupils of other schools were invited, and the victor of the contest was regarded as the smartest thing on earth. At the spelling school the year before the championship had been wrested from No. 5 by No. 6, and the schoolmaster of the latter district had his salary raised \$3 per month. This fact invested the coming contest with more than usual excitement.

A day or two before the contest Miss Baker learned that Seth lived just over the line in district No. 6. He would therefore be an opponent, and, no matter how deficient he was in other branches, he was accounted a prodigy in orthography.

"He feels that I have snubbed him, and he is now going to have revenge on me. I wish he only knew how sorry I am."

The schoolhouse was jammed with teachers, pupils and parents, and all recognized the fact that it was No. 5 versus No. 6. The teacher of No. 6 was a young man, but he was there to win if he could, and so were his best spell-

ers. Queerly enough, it came about that Miss Baker and Seth Thomas headed the opposition lists, and they were opposite each other as Squire Jameson took the spelling book and gave out the first word. Things went easy at first, but when he came to the four syllable words the ranks began to thin. Fifteen minutes later there were only five on a side. Ten minutes more and only six in all were standing, four of whom were No. 6's. Then the word "separate" knocked down two of the latter, and the contest went on for a few minutes with two on a side. Then came the word "Impecuniosity," and Miss Baker and Seth Thomas were alone on the floor. There were yelling and cheering, followed by silence, as the squire looked for the hardest words.

"I shall be beaten," sighed the schoolma'am, "and the whole district will be humiliated. If it were anybody but Seth, who thinks I meant to snub him, I wouldn't care so much. I wish—I wish—"

"We will now resume," interrupted the squire, and with solemn deliberation he gave out a score of big words in succession. In time he must reach the word "epidemiological." Miss Baker knew it was there, and she knew she always blundered over it, and if it came to her the championship was gone. It came to Seth, however, and for the first time he raised his eyes from the floor and looked into hers. She did not read revenge there, but self sacrifice. An instant later, with the audience holding its breath, he began on the word and at the fifth division of it put in an "a" for the "o" with such emphasis as to give her the cue, and as he sat down she spelled the word right, at which the champions of No. 5 almost lifted the roof with their yells. An hour later as he walked up the road to Carsons' beside her she asked:

"But why did you do it? I am sure you misspelled the word on purpose."

"I—I guess it was for love," replied Seth as he turned his head away and stubbed his toes into the snow.